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Annual Report 2003 – 2004

Minister's Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities

Employment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities

BCEmployment Assistance

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Council Mandate

The principal goal of the Minister's Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities is to advise the Minister of Human Resources on solutions and strategies for increasing the employment, employability and independence of persons with disabilities, particularly through partnerships with business and industry throughout BC.

The Minister's Council is a "call to action" and a positive challenge to BC's business community.

On behalf of the BC Ministry of Human Resources, I am pleased to present the first annual report of the Minister's Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities.

Currently in our province, persons with disabilities face an unemployment rate twice that of persons without disabilities. The Government of BC recognizes that persons with disabilities want, and need, to achieve greater independence and participate more fully in the workforce and in their community. To help us achieve this goal, the Minister's Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities was convened in January 2003.

As a key initiative of the provincial government's Employment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, the council operates as a partnership between government, business, education, community-based organizations and persons with disabilities. It is made up of public and private sector leaders, listed on page 12 of this report, who are committed to working together to improve the employment picture for persons with disabilities across our province.

To the members of the Minister's Council, I applaud each of you for the enthusiasm, drive and dedication you have brought to the table over the past year. In particular, I commend former Minister of Human Resources Murray Coell for his vision in founding the council, and his determination to see that persons with disabilities enjoy the same work opportunities as persons without disabilities.

And, finally, to readers of this report, I thank you for your interest in the council's work. We welcome your questions and input.

The Honourable Stanley B. Hagen
Council Chair
Minister of Human Resources

BC's Employment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities

Working Towards Greater Self-Reliance and Participation

The Ministry of Human Resources supports individuals and families in achieving their social and economic potential by moving people from income assistance to sustainable employment and by providing income assistance to those in need.

In April 2002, as a part of its three-year Service Plan, the Ministry announced a new Employment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities. This strategy is a comprehensive approach to support persons with disabilities who want to take advantage of opportunities to work in full-time, part-time, temporary or voluntary employment. It provides for continued assistance to those who are not expected to be able to gain independence.

The deployment of the government's strategy has focused on two key initiatives:

- Development of a specialized Employment Program for Persons with Disabilities, which commenced in late 2002; and,
- Establishment of the Minister's Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities, which held its inaugural meeting in January 2003.

Further to these initiatives, in April 2003, the government established a $20 million endowment fund with Vancouver Foundation to help British Columbians with disabilities find and keep jobs. Called the Disability Supports for Employment Fund, this endowment is used to provide a range of supports that enable persons with disabilities to participate in the workplace, as they are able. Approximately one million dollars in income from the Fund will be distributed in grants each year to BC charities.

A Comprehensive Employment Program for Persons with Disabilities

Through the Employment Program for Persons with Disabilities, the Ministry offers a full range of services, tools and supports such as job training and placement, technical equipment, physical accommodations and follow-up workplace support.

The program includes five key components:

Pre-Employment Services, launched December 2002, provides access to job-related training in areas such as computer skills, decision-making and interview preparation.

Planning and Employment Services, launched September 2003, assists individuals in assessing their goals, skills and necessary employment supports, and provides placement and follow-up services.

Disability Supports for Employment, also launched September 2003, provides goods and services required for training and employment, such as interpreter services for the deaf, transportation and workplace modifications.

Self-Employment Services, launched in May 2004, assists individuals both in setting up and running their own business, and in assessing their ability to run their own business and identifying their financing options.

Assistive Technology, launched in September 2003, provides supports such as computerized reading and writing systems, speech recognition systems, and assistive listening and communication systems.

The Disability Supports for Employment Fund

Removing Barriers to Employment

The lack of disability supports – goods and services designed to assist persons with disabilities in securing and retaining employment – is one of the top barriers in the path to employment for persons with disabilities.

The Disability Supports for Employment Fund was created in April 2003 to provide specialized accommodation, such as vehicle or workplace modification, as well as tools and services to help persons with disabilities overcome barriers to participating in employment or employment-related activities.

The Fund was established with a $20 million endowment from the BC Government and is administered by the Vancouver Foundation. The foundation was selected as fund manager because of its long-standing history of philanthropic leadership in BC and its province-wide mandate.

Grants are awarded annually in June and December. The Minister's Council on Employment for Persons Disabilities provides advice to the Vancouver Foundation on the disbursement of funds.

For more information about the Disability Supports for Employment Fund, including funding guidelines, the grant application process and application deadlines visit the Vancouver Foundation website at: www.vancouverfoundation.bc.ca

2003-2004 Granting Highlights

$50,000 **British Columbia Paraplegic Association (BC)**
To help develop Specialized Employment Technology Support Services targeted at persons with severe disabilities wishing to engage in entrepreneurship.

$10,000 **Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion**
To provide physiotherapy services and adaptive technology to artists with disabilities who are members of the Artists Helping Artists Cooperative.

$42,510 **Central Okanagan Brain Injury Society**
To put in place a Vocational Support Specialist for people with acquired brain injury.

$37,678 **Canadian Mental Health Association Cowichan Valley Branch 1992**
To train five peer support workers as mental health job coaches

$50,000 **Neil Squire Foundation**
To provide employment-related technical aids, assessments, personal services or equipment modifications for persons with disabilities

$25,494 **Penticton and District Society for Community Living**
To support the Employment Partnership Program and help create meaningful employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

$50,000 **Powell River Model Community Project for Persons with Disabilities Society** and the **Powell River Association for Community Living**
To create and support work experiences and employment opportunities for persons with developmental and other learning disabilities.

$30,000 **STEPS Forward Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Society**
To support the development of a STEPS Co-op Work program for young adults with intellectual disabilities involved in post-secondary education at University of British Columbia.

Research Report Evaluates Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

To provide a current profile of persons with disabilities in BC, the Minister's Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities commissioned R.A. Malatest & Associates to conduct a preliminary research study. The report, "A Profile Of Persons With Disabilities In British Columbia: Employment, Labour Market Needs And Occupational Projections," completed in December 2003, examines the employment and employability of persons with disabilities in BC, contrasted against projected labour force challenges and opportunities to be confronted in the province in future.

The report concluded that:

Profile

- There are over 500,000 British Columbians with disabilities. Approximately 350,000 are between the ages of 15 and 64 and considered of working age. While 44% of these individuals reported they were employed, 21% declared they were unemployed and 30% stated they were not in the labour market.
- The annual income range most frequently reported amongst persons with disabilities in BC was between $10,000 and $15,000. Women with disabilities on average earned 53% less than their non-disabled counterparts, while men with disabilities on average earned 63% less than non-disabled men.
- Educational attainment does not appear to be a reason for poor labour market outcomes for persons with disabilities.
- Employers are not utilizing the skills and abilities of persons with disabilities to their fullest potential.

The Labour Market

- Labour market trends in BC indicate a growing need to consider non-traditional labour market groups. Low employment growth, a reduction in new labour force entrants to drive employment growth and labour force shortages associated with the aging of the work force are key contributing factors.
- In the future, the BC labour force will need to fill a significant number of positions – an estimated 913,287 positions between 2003 and 2015. This estimate does not include projected job openings associated with the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games and two major capital projects; the Sea to Sky Highway upgrade, and the Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre upgrade.
- The 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games can provide the opportunity to create a labour market development strategy for persons with disabilities.

Gaps in BC

- Despite the availability of projects and studies aimed at helping persons with disabilities find and maintain employment, some gaps exist in the areas of research, workplace practice and knowledge.
- Existing data does not have sufficient focus on employment and labour market issues or the experiences and needs of persons with disabilities in the workplace.
- Employment projects do not always provide what persons with disabilities want or require. Much of the emphasis on improving labour market outcomes is placed on the individual needing to change, rather than their potential employers. New types of work, such as telework or home-based work, may offer new opportunities, and new technology could be better utilized.

- Employers need better, more readily available information about workplace needs of persons with disabilities. The sharing of information about successful strategies used by persons with disabilities, both in their employment search and on the job, would challenge stereotypes, promote positive role models for persons with disabilities and demonstrate capability to potential employers.

Opportunities for Action

- With future employment projections for BC pointing to greater labour demand amid shrinking labour supply, there are many potential employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. However, systemic issues and historical biases in labour practices must be examined and corrected in order for persons with disabilities to have access to these employment opportunities. A coordinated effort by employers and government will be required.

"A Profile Of Persons With Disabilities In British Columbia: Employment, Labour Market Needs And Occupational Projections," report can be viewed and downloaded from www.mhr.gov.bc.ca/epwd/

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2010 Olympic Legacy for Persons with Disabilities

The hosting of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games and completion of two major capital projects – the Sea-to-Sky Highway Upgrade, and the Vancouver Convention & Exhibition Centre Expansion – will generate significant employment growth. During the period of 2003 to 2015, labour demand will increase to 1,045,085 openings, of which 485,000 will be new jobs.

The 2010 Human Resources Planning Committee partnered with the Minister's Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities to establish recommendations regarding employment for persons with disabilities leading up to and including the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The HR Planning Committee incorporated research from the Minister's Council regarding the profile of persons with disabilities in BC and tabled its report in December 2004.

The Minister's Council looks forward to continuing its input regarding the 2010 Olympic legacy opportunity for persons with disabilities.

[1]2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Labour Demand Analysis, Roslyn Kunin & Associates, Inc., October 2003.

The Next Steps

In 2004/05, the Minister's Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities will focus on advancing the strategies that are currently in place to increase the employment and independence of persons with disabilities.

To better understand the workplace environment, including the issues faced by employees with disabilities, their co-workers and their employers, the Ministry, acting on behalf of the Minister's Council is undertaking a major research project. The objective of this project is to collect accurate and timely information about persons with disabilities, their places of employment, their employers and the system of supports that will sustain and enhance their capacity to be employed.

The project will document BC employers' experiences, approaches, challenges and best practices associated with recruitment and retention of employees with disabilities. The results of this research will be used to develop a handbook for employers to assist them in recruiting and accommodating persons with disabilities. This practical resource will also be used to encourage employers to develop potential employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The project research results and the employer's handbook will be presented at a conference sponsored by the Minister's Council in the fall of 2004.

Members of the Minister's Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities

Don Avison, President, University Presidents' Council of British Columbia

Maurizio Baldini, Coordinator, Peer Support Program, South Okanagan-Similkameen Branch, Canadian Mental Health Association

Susan Brice, Minister of State for Mental Health and Addiction Services

Robert Buchan, President, B.C. University Colleges Consortium

Bonnie Campbell, Vice-President, Human Resources and Public Relations, Thrifty Foods

Robin Ciceri, Deputy Minister of Human Resources

Alice Downing, Consultant, Trustee of the BC Pulp and Paper Industry Health and Welfare Plan

Ron Drolet, Vice-President, Customer Service and Corporate Secretary, BC Transit

Kevin Evans, Vice-President, Western Canada, Retail Council of Canada

Stanley B. Hagen (Chair), Minister of Human Resources

Rob Johnston, Vice President, Service Delivery, Western Canada, Royal Bank of Canada

Mary Mahon Jones, CEO, Council of Tourism Associations

Winston Leckie, Executive Director, ORW

Clint Mahlman, Vice President, Human Resources, London Drugs Limited

Michele Mawhinney, Director, Human Resources, Vancouver International Airport Authority

David Park, Assistant Managing Director and Chief Economist, Vancouver Board of Trade

Jim Reed, President, B.C. College Presidents

Bill Ross, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, British Columbia and Yukon Region, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

Sam Sullivan, Founder and Executive Director, Tetra Society of North America, Disabled Sailing Association, B.C. Mobility Opportunities Society, Vancouver Adapted Music Society, ConnecTra Society and PHILIA

Mike Touchie, President, B.C. Aboriginal Network on Disability Society

John Winter, President, B.C. Chamber of Commerce

For more information about the Minister's Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities, visit www.mhr.gov.bc.ca/epwd/